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Pattern of conferences

Report of the Fifth Committee

Rapporteur: Mr. Haile Selassie **Getachew** (Ethiopia)

I. Introduction

1. The previous recommendation made by the Fifth Committee to the General Assembly under agenda item 116 appears in the report of the Committee contained in document A/57/651.

2. The Fifth Committee resumed its consideration of the item at its 43rd meeting, on 10 March 2003. Statements and observations made in the course of the Committee's consideration of the item are reflected in the relevant summary record (A/C.5/57/SR.43).

II. Consideration of draft resolution A/C.5/57/L.54

3. At the 43rd meeting, on 10 March, the representative of Singapore, coordinator of the informal consultations, introduced, on behalf of the Chairman, a draft resolution entitled "Pattern of conferences" (A/C.5/57/L.54), and orally corrected operative paragraph 12 of section II.B by replacing the words "and that they improve and not negatively affect the quality and timeliness of technical support services being provided to intergovernmental bodies or the quantity of production and distribution of documents in hard copies" by the words "and that they should improve and not negatively affect the quality and timeliness of technical support services being provided to intergovernmental bodies and not negatively affect the quantity of production and distribution of documents in hard copies".

4. Before the adoption of the draft resolution, statements were made by the representatives of Morocco (on behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that are members of the Group of 77 and China), the Syrian Arab Republic, Cuba, the United States of America and Greece (on behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that are members of the European Union) (see A/C.5/57/SR.43).

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5. At the same meeting, the Committee adopted draft resolution A/C.5/57/L.54, as orally corrected, without a vote (see para. 7).

6. After the adoption of the draft resolution, statements in explanation of position were made by the representatives of Mexico (on behalf of the 20 Spanish-speaking countries), Botswana (on behalf of the Group of African States) and Cuba (see A/C.5/57/SR.43).

III. Recommendation of the Fifth Committee

7. The Fifth Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolution:

Pattern of conferences

The General Assembly,

Recalling its relevant resolutions, including resolutions 40/243 of 18 December 1985, 41/213 of 19 December 1986, 43/222 A to E of 21 December 1988, 52/214 of 22 December 1997, 54/248 of 23 December 1999, 55/222 of 23 December 2000, 56/242 of 24 December 2001, 56/254 D of 27 March 2002, 56/262 of 15 February 2002, 56/287 of 27 June 2002 and 57/283 of 20 December 2002,

Reaffirming its resolution 42/207 C of 11 December 1987, in which it requested the Secretary-General to ensure the equal treatment of the official languages of the United Nations,

Having considered the report of the Committee on Conferences[1] and the reports of the Secretary-General,[2]

Having also considered the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions,[3]

1. *Endorses* the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions contained in its report,[3] subject to the provisions of the present resolution;

2. *Takes note* of the report of the Committee on Conferences.[1]

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[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 32* and corrigendum (A/57/32 and Corr.1).

[2] A/56/901, A/57/228 and Add.1 and 2, A/57/289 and A/C.5/56/37.

[3] A/57/472.

I
Calendar of conferences and meetings

1. *Notes with satisfaction* that the Secretariat took into account the arrangements referred to in General Assembly resolutions 53/208 A of 18 December 1998, 54/248, 55/222 and 56/242 concerning Orthodox Good Friday and the official holidays of Id al-Fitr and Id al-Adha, and requests all intergovernmental bodies to observe those decisions when planning their meetings;

2. *Reaffirms* its decision that the headquarters rule shall be adhered to by all bodies, and decides that waivers to the headquarters rule shall be granted solely on the basis of the calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations, as recommended by the Committee on Conferences for adoption by the General Assembly;

3. *Also reaffirms* the relevant provisions established by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/11 of 2 November 1995 on multilingualism;

4. *Requests* the Secretary-General, when planning the calendar of conferences and meetings, to avoid simultaneous peak periods at the various duty stations and to avoid scheduling meetings of related intergovernmental bodies too closely together;

5. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that any modification to the calendar of conferences and meetings is implemented strictly in accordance with the mandate of the Committee on Conferences and other relevant General Assembly resolutions;

6. *Reaffirms* that the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, when deciding upon its meeting schedule, including meetings away from Headquarters, should take into account the programme of work of the Fifth Committee;

II
A. Utilization of conference-servicing resources and facilities

1. *Notes with deep concern* that the overall utilization factor at the four duty stations in 2001 dropped six points below the benchmark of 80 per cent, with a 14 per cent drop in New York, which accounted for the overall decrease;

2. *Urges* the secretariats and bureaux of bodies that underutilize their conference resources to work more closely with the Department and to consider changes to their programme of work, including adjustments based on previous patterns for recurring agenda items, with a view to reducing underutilization;

3. *Notes with appreciation* that, as a result of the establishment of a permanent interpretation service at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, the number of meetings at which interpretation services have been provided increased by 23.5 per cent in 2001 and the number of events held increased by 10 per cent;

4. *Notes with concern* that the severe constraint of adequate conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi poses a serious challenge for any further increase in utilization;

5. *Reiterates* its request to the Secretary-General, contained in section II, paragraph 24, of its resolution 56/242, to consider improving and modernizing the

conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi in order to accommodate adequately major meetings and conferences and to report thereon to the General Assembly at the main part of its fifty-eighth session through the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Committee on Conferences;

6. *Welcomes* the efforts made during the previous year to improve the utilization of conference services at the United Nations Office at Nairobi;

7. *Expresses regret* that the written report on utilization of conference facilities and services at the United Nations Office at Nairobi for the current period was not submitted for consideration by the Committee on Conferences;

8. *Requests* the Secretary-General to submit the aforementioned written report on utilization of conference facilities and services at the United Nations Office at Nairobi for consideration to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session, through the Committee on Conferences;

9. *Reaffirms* that all meetings of Nairobi-based bodies shall take place in Nairobi except as otherwise authorized by the General Assembly or the Committee on Conferences acting on its behalf;

10. *Strongly discourages* any invitation for hosting meetings which would violate the headquarters rule, in particular for United Nations centres with a low utilization level;

11. *Reiterates its encouragement* to the Secretary-General to continue to intensify efforts being made by the United Nations Office at Nairobi to attract more meetings to its facilities;

12. *Notes*, in the report of the Secretary-General,[4] that the percentage of requests met for meetings with interpretation in New York by regional and other major groupings of Member States continued to increase, from 92 per cent during the period 2000-2001 to 97 per cent during the period from July 2001 to April 2002, and that overall, for the four duty stations, 98 per cent of the requests were met, and encourages the Secretariat to maintain that trend;

13. *Requests* the Secretary-General, in this regard, to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session, through the Committee on Conferences, on the methodology that accurately reflects the situation of the provision of conference services to regional and other major groupings of Member States, taking into account the concerns raised in its resolutions 56/254 D and 56/287;

14. *Reaffirms* its decision in its resolution 56/242 to include all necessary resources in the budget for the biennium 2004-2005 to provide interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States upon request by those groups, on an ad hoc basis, in accordance with established practice, and requests the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session, through the Committee on Conferences, a report on the implementation of this decision;

15. *Requests* the Secretary-General to provide information on meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States not serviced by conference

[4] A/57/228, chap. II.B.3.

services in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005;

16. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to submit a separate detailed report to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session on the cost implications of providing more predictable and adequate conference services to the meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States, for its consideration in the context of the proposed programme budget for 2004-2005;

17. *Further requests* the Secretary-General, when preparing budget proposals for conference services, to ensure that the level of resources proposed for temporary assistance is commensurate with the full demand for services, estimated on the basis of current experience;

18. *Requests* the Secretary-General to continue to report in writing on the utilization rates of interpretation services and conference facilities at all duty stations;

19. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to develop methods and indicators for assessing the performance of conference services from a full system standpoint, in particular their cost-effectiveness, efficiency and productivity in carrying out their mandates, taking into account the best practices and experiences of other bodies and organizations that provide analogous services, including, specifically, their experience in developing unit cost measures of full work processes, and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session through the Committee on Conferences;

20. *Encourages* the Committee on Conferences to keep under continued review the procedures for the participation of observers in the work of the Committee;

21. *Requests* the Secretary-General to continue to explore all possible options to increase further the utilization of the conference centre at the Economic Commission for Africa and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session through the Committee on Conferences;

B. Improving the performance of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services

1. *Reaffirms* that the Fifth Committee is the appropriate Main Committee of the General Assembly entrusted with responsibilities for administrative and budgetary matters;

2. *Welcomes* the intention of the Secretary-General to develop, as soon as possible, with the advice and support of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, an implementation plan for the envisaged improvements, taking into account the provisions of the present resolution, and requests the Secretary-General to include progress indicators in the plan;

3. *Notes* the proposal to integrate the functions of the technical servicing secretariats of the Fifth and Sixth Committees of the General Assembly into the Department, and requests the Secretary-General to submit this proposal in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 for further consideration;

4. *Recognizes* the need to develop or update existing workload standards so as to reflect functions performed by language staff not currently included, taking into account the best practices and experience of other bodies and organizations engaged in analogous work and drawing on expert advice, while taking into consideration the impact of technological innovations;

5. *Invites* the Secretary-General, in the light of the complex intellectual nature of the language services, to develop further the performance indicators in order to evaluate the quality of the functions performed by them to the satisfaction of the Member States;

6. *Reaffirms* the concepts of delegation of authority and enforcement of accountability, which should be applied in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly;

7. *Stresses* that the Department is responsible for the implementation of policy, formulation of standards and guidelines, for overseeing and coordinating United Nations conference services and overall management of resources under the relevant budget section, while the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi remain responsible and accountable for the day-to-day operational activities;

8. *Also stresses* that the responsibilities and functions of the Department and major duty stations in the budgetary and human resources areas should be clearly defined in accordance with the relevant mandates, taking into account specificities of the various duty stations and their functioning in the field of conference services, when enhancing global management;

9. *Requests* the Secretary-General, when implementing paragraph 8 of the present section, to ensure a comprehensive dialogue and coordination between the Department and the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, with advice from the Office of Internal Oversight Services, as required, in accordance with its mandate, in preparing revisions to the relevant secretariat's documents;

10. *Notes* the intention to strengthen and integrate editorial support functions, and stresses the importance of maintaining an official records editing function while strengthening the pre-editing functions in the Department so as to improve the timeliness of submission of documentation, as mandated by the General Assembly;

11. *Requests* the Secretary-General, as a follow-up to his report,[5] to report on how the reform initiative will involve the other major duty stations, taking into account their specificities and operational responsibilities, in the context of the present resolution;

12. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that the structural and name changes of the Department will be consistent with the existing mandates, inter alia, the medium-term plan, as well as ensuring the implementation of these mandates, and not lead to any involuntary personnel departures, and that they should improve and not negatively affect the quality and timeliness of technical support services being provided to intergovernmental bodies and not negatively affect the quantity of production and distribution of documents in hard copies, as requested by

[5] A/57/289.

Member States, simultaneously in the six official languages, and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session;

13. *Concurs* with the observation of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, contained in paragraph 6 of its report,[3] that a pragmatic approach should be followed in order not to introduce unnecessary restrictions on the ability of an intergovernmental body or conference to reach a successful conclusion;

III
Documentation- and publication-related matters

1. *Notes with deep concern* the low rate of compliance with the six-week rule for the issuance of documentation, and encourages the Secretary-General, in view of the impact of late submissions on the timely issuance of documents, to deal with this alarming situation;

2. *Reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General to ensure that documentation is available in accordance with the six-week rule for the distribution of documents simultaneously in the six official languages of the General Assembly;

3. *Reiterates its deep regret* concerning the failure of author departments to abide by section III, paragraph 5, of its resolution 55/222, and in this regard requests the Secretary-General to take corrective measures to ensure the full implementation of this provision;

4. *Requests* the Secretary-General to take all necessary measures to ensure compliance of the Secretariat, organizations, bodies and organs with the request contained in paragraph 3 of the present section, and to submit a report on violations to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session;

5. *Notes* that the failure to abide by section III, paragraph 5, of its resolution 55/222 also connotes failure to abide by the six-week rule for the availability of documents, as well as its resolution 50/11 on multilingualism, in which the Assembly recalled the need to ensure the simultaneous distribution of documents in the six official languages of the United Nations;

6. *Notes with appreciation* that some progress has been made by the Secretary-General to comply with some of the provisions of section III, paragraph 5, of its resolution 56/242, and requests the Secretary-General to continue to direct all departments to include, where appropriate, the following elements in reports originating in the Secretariat:

(*a*) A summary of the report;

(*b*) Consolidated conclusions, recommendations and other proposed actions;

(*c*) Relevant background information;

7. *Reiterates* that all documents submitted to legislative organs by the Secretariat and expert bodies for consideration and action should have conclusions and recommendations in bold print;

8. *Reiterates its request* to the Office of Internal Oversight Services to submit its reports in accordance with paragraph 12 of General Assembly resolution 53/208 B of 18 December 1998;

9. *Regrets* that, if a report is issued late, some departments of the Secretariat still do not indicate the reasons for the delay when the report is introduced;

10. *Reiterates its decision* that, if a report is submitted late to conference services, the reasons therefor should be included in a footnote to the document;

11. *Notes with concern* the current situation of late submission and issuance of documents as well as its negative impact on the functioning of intergovernmental and expert bodies;

12. *Notes* that the Department will assign timing of submission of manuscripts that takes into account the programme of work of the session at which the report is to be considered and the time needed to produce the document simultaneously in the six official languages at a high level of quality;

13. *Also notes* the intention of the Secretary-General to improve the current situation of late submission and issuance of documents with this approach in order to comply more effectively with the existing rules on the issuance of documentation, and stresses in this regard that such an approach should be aimed at improving the functioning of the Secretariat and, at the same time, facilitating the work of Member States, and requests the Secretary-General to report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session;

14. *Reiterates* the need to develop a responsibility and accountability system within the Secretariat in order to ensure timely submission of documents for processing;

15. *Requests* the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive report to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session on the implementation of paragraph 14 of the present section, taking into consideration section III, paragraph 10, of its resolution 56/242;

16. *Reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General to bring to the attention of the organs concerned, when they are taking action on draft resolutions and decisions, rules 78 and 120 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly;

17. *Notes with concern* the delay in the issuance of verbatim and summary records, and in this regard requests the Secretary-General to take appropriate measures to ameliorate the situation;

18. *Reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General to study the possibility of further measures in this regard, including enhanced cooperation between the production of press releases by the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat and the preparation of summary records by the Department, bearing in mind the different nature of press releases and summary records;

19. *Also reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General to ensure the communication of resolutions adopted by the General Assembly to the States Members of the United Nations within fifteen days of the close of each session in order to overcome regrettable delays;

20. *Notes* the intention of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia to increase the percentage of documents available in Arabic to 100 per cent during the biennium 2004-2005, and in this regard reaffirms all its relevant resolutions in which it requested the Secretary-General fully to ensure the issuance

of all documents and publications of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia in Arabic;

21. *Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure the full implementation of paragraph 20 of the present section and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session;

22. *Stresses* the need to maintain the distribution of hard copy documents to Member States simultaneously in all official languages;

23. *Also stresses* that printing on demand should not negatively affect the quality of services provided and the quantity of documents required by Member States;

24. *Notes* the proposal to improve electronic access to United Nations collections, publications and parliamentary documents, and requests the Secretary-General to keep the internal capacity for the provision of hard copies at the request of Member States, subject to the relevant provisions of its resolution 56/242;

25. *Welcomes* the elimination of pouch or courier shipments of documents to duty stations in the light of the capability of duty stations to download and print their own copies from the Official Documents System or other United Nations databases;

26. *Requests* the Secretary-General to seek confirmation from Member States on the number of hard copy document sets required by each Member State;

27. *Notes* the intention of the Secretary-General to engage in consultations with universities, depository libraries and other institutions regarding the continued provision of United Nations documentation to them;

28. *Requests* the Secretary-General to provide a report on the outcome of the aforementioned consultations to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session;

29. *Reaffirms* section B of its resolution 52/214, and re-emphasizes that any reduction in the length of documents should not adversely affect either the quality of the presentation or the substantive content of the documents and that the reduction should be implemented in a flexible manner with respect to the consolidated reports;

30. *Reiterates* paragraph 20 of its resolution 54/249 of 23 December 1999, and requests the Secretary-General to address this issue in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005;

IV
Translation- and interpretation-related matters

1. *Notes with concern* that the Arabic and English units in the Interpretation Service at the United Nations Office at Nairobi are not yet fully staffed, and in this regard reiterates its request to the Secretary-General contained in section IV, paragraph 9, of its resolution 56/242 to fill expeditiously the remaining vacancies and requests the Secretary-General to report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session;

2. *Emphasizes* the importance of multilingualism and the equality of the six official languages of the United Nations;

3. *Requests* the Secretary-General, in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005, to make proposals so as to fill the de facto gap between the Spanish Translation Service and the other official language services with similar workloads, without any adverse effect on the other official language services;

4. *Takes note with concern* of the high vacancy rate in the Spanish Translation Service;

5. *Requests* the Secretary-General to take all necessary measures to fill expeditiously the vacant posts in all six official language services of the United Nations and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session;

6. *Also requests* the Secretary-General to submit a report to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session on the implementation of section IV, paragraph 6, of its resolution 56/242;

7. *Notes with deep concern* that some official documents are not translated into all the official languages of the Organization, and reiterates its request contained in paragraph 8 of its resolution 56/242;

8. *Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure that efforts continue to be made to improve the quality control of language services at all duty stations;

9. *Reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General to ensure that translation, in principle, reflects the specificity of each language;

10. *Also reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General, in order to improve further the quality of translation of documents issued in the six official languages, to ensure continuous dialogue between translation staff and interpretation staff, between United Nations headquarters in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi and between translation divisions and Member States with regard to the standardization of the terminology used;

11. *Further reiterates its request* to the Secretary-General to hold informational meetings in order to brief Member States periodically on the terminology used;

12. *Requests* the Secretary-General to conduct consultations, with the Member States concerned, on the improvement of the translation services;

13. *Recalls* section IV, paragraph 1, of its resolution 56/242, in which it requested the Secretary-General not to conduct further pilot projects on remote interpretation until technological developments so warrant, and in this regard requests the Secretary-General to take into consideration the experiences of international institutions and organizations in this area, as expressed in paragraph 102 of the report of the Secretary-General;[6]

[6] A/57/228.

V

Information technology

Emphasizes that the primary goal of the introduction of new technology should be to enhance the quality of conference services and to ensure their timely provision.

* * *

Requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session on the implementation of the present resolution.